



Primestar 500

March 8, 1998
Hampton, GA



Pre-Race

(March 4, 1998) – Gumout Pontiac driver Derrike Cope hopes the determination the Bahari Racing team has showcased through a tough-luck, three-race start to the NASCAR Winston Cup season fuels a solid run in Sunday's Primestar 500 at Atlanta Motor Speedway.

There are reasons for optimism in owner Chuck Rider's camp. Cope had his best run last season for MB2 Motorsports when he finished fifth on Atlanta's reconfigured 1.54-mile track last November in the NAPA 500. Crew chief Doug Hewitt helped Johnny Benson to his first career pole position as a rookie in 1996 when they captured the top starting spot for the spring race there.

"Looking back, I think we could have done a few things to make the car a tick better, and we might have had an even better shot to win," Cope said of his strong Atlanta run last year. "At one spot in that race we were the best car out there.

"I really like the new layout at Atlanta. I liked the grip it had in November. You call really manipulate the car and drive it hard. I feel good about going back there. We're going to go there with some guarded optimism and a good, standard package."

Cope is pleased with the fortitude the team has shown through a tough start to the season. Cope's Gumout Pontiac roared as high as second in the season-opening Daytona 500, only to get collected in a freak accident on pit road that ruined realistic aspirations of a trip to victory lane. NASCAR's new spoiler rules had all GM teams struggling through the next two races at Rockingham and Las Vegas. But now NASCAR has cut the Fords' spoilers by a quarter inch, giving Cope hope that the Gumout Pontiac can run up front at Atlanta.

"If you rate a team on heart, determination and relentlessness, I'd say we're about a nine-and-a-half on a scale of 10," Cope said. "I really believe these guys have the heart and desire to get it done. They don't give up. They keep battling, believing and continuing on. You're going to win some races doing that."

Atlanta's a good place to start.

In first round qualifying, Derrike took the track as the 44th of 50 cars and produced a time of 29.067 and speed of 190.732. This was good enough at the time for 18th place. At the end of the round, the Gumout Pontiac only fell to 19th where Derrike will start the race. The race is on Sunday at 1pm EST.

TV Report

Derrike started the race in 19th and had an onboard camera today, sponsored by Briggs & Stratton.

- 25th position - lap 11 of 325
- 27th - lap 13 (one of the few that pitted under caution)
- 35th - lap 17 (restart)
- 6th - lap 28 (after caution)
- 3rd - lap 29 (Derrike was battling Geoff Bodine for 3rd)
- 2nd - lap 49 (Bill Weber commented on DC saying, "He's very confident of his Pontiac and very confident of his crew.")
- lap 50 (caution came out, ESPN showed DC's pit stop of 11.4 seconds, taking on two tires, came out leading)
- 6th - lap 65
- 7th - lap 80
- laps 119-129 (Caution for rain. Jerry Punch did a piece on chassis setup and featured Steve Leavitt's and the Gumout cars.)
- 22nd - lap 138
- 23rd - lap 154
- 27th - lap 160 (caution for rain)
- lap 203 - Derrike blew a right rear tire and from the in-car camera, you could hear it explode. Derrike hit the Turn 2 wall and had to be cut out of the car.

Derrike finished the race in 38th, down 142 laps, and led laps 52-55. Derrike was taken to the infield care center where crew chief Doug Hewitt said Derrike's wife Renee was with him, and that they were going to take him to the hospital and keep him overnight for observation. RPM2Night reported that Derrike had a bruised chest.

A video of Derrike's in-car camera at the time of the incident is here. This uses RealAudio Player version 5.0.

Winston			
Start	Finish	Status	Money
19	38	Accident	Won
			Points
			54
			\$28,400
			Standing
			31

Note: Thanks to Angela Walker for the TV report.

Official Report

HAMPTON, Ga. (March 9, 1998) -- A hard crash midway through Monday's Primestar 500 at Atlanta Motor Speedway ended a strong run by Derrike Cope and landed the driver of the Gumout Pontiac in a nearby hospital for an overnight stay.

X-rays were taken on Cope's chest and stomach, and he underwent a CAT scan, but all the tests came out negative. He was kept overnight for observation at Georgia Baptist Medical Center in Atlanta. Doctors were hoping to release him Tuesday afternoon after more tests.

Cope finished 38th, but retained 31st-place in the NASCAR Winston Cup point standings.

Cope was having one of his strongest runs of the season for owner Chuck Rider's Bahari' Racing team. After qualifying 19, Cope took advantage of some savvy pit work orchestrated by crew chief Doug Hewitt to take the lead on lap 52. Cope held the point for four laps. He remained in the top-10 before having to pit twice to have his windshield cleaned. A sticky residue left by tape pulled off the windshield caused Cope sight problems, forcing an extra pit stop.

Cope was again battling his way to the front when a right-rear tire blew on lap 203 of the 325-lap race. The Gumout Pontiac hit the turn two wall hard, ending the race day.

Next up for the Gumout Racing team is the March 22 TranSouth Financial 400 at Darlington Raceway.

More information is available on [Derrike's condition](#).

Live Reports

Patty Greenberg was in Atlanta and provided a [report](#).

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